

Celebrating Christmas with Chemical Sensitivities

by Simone Wrona



How MCS radically changed one family's Christmas, causing both conflict and heartwarming support.

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During the Christmas holiday I thought about how much my Christmas had changed in just a few years. Five or six years ago the whole family was together — at least those of us living in Denmark, as my family is dispersed around the globe. We were typically ten or twelve people around the table for Christmas dinner, the food could be smelled throughout the house, and candles were illuminating it all beautifully. It was very cozy and it was unthinkable to celebrate Christmas in any other way.

Today things are very different. This year we were four people around the table for Christmas dinner: my mother, my father, my sister and I. The rest of the family, which always had been present, decided that they preferred using fragrances and not accommodating my mother, who has MCS.

It hurts when people close to you choose their fabric softener, hair spray and an expensive Gucci perfume instead of you. It has cost many hours of sadness to accept that they made those choices. But in time we have chosen to focus on the good things, the things that are possible. That has made us stronger and closer to each other.

My parents cannot cook indoors due to the cooking odors. They cook on their porch every day and the Christmas dinner was no different. The duck [a traditional holiday dish in Denmark] was made in a crockpot (slow cooker). The rest was made by my sister and I using two electrical hotplates. We wore warm sweaters, large bathrobes and scarves, and had glasses with red wine in our hands. It was cold, it was windy and it took a long time as we had just the two hot plates and had to figure out in what order to cook the various dishes.

But we had a great time. It was unbelievably funny, we have never laughed so much as while cooking this meal. My parents set the table on the other side of the window, my mom had fun taking pictures of us and we toasted each other through the window.

MCS demands major changes, people disappear out of our lives, things have to be done radically different. In my family we always try to focus on the positive, what is possible, and that empowers us. When it works, then we fully enjoy it. We are together when it happens and we remember it with joy.

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